

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6655

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 3151

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR EG LY

SUBJ: EGYPT/LIBYA: THE WIDENING GAP

REF: CAIRO 3100

1. PUBLIC EGYPTIAN RIPOSTE TO RADIO TRIPOLI BROADCAST OF QADHAAFI LETTER TO SADAT (REFTEL) IS MOST RECENT SURFACING OF INCREASINGLY BITTER FALLING OUT BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA THAT HAS OCCURRED SINCE OCTOBER WAR. SEVERAL EGYPTIANS AT UPPER LEVEL OF FOREIGN POLICY ESTABLISHMENT HAVE EXPRESSED TO US THEIR CONCERN ABOUT VARIOUS ASPECTS OF MATTER, INCLUDING WHAT THEY TERM AS UNWISE GOE PUBLIC HANDLING OF TRIPOLI BROADCAST AND OF GROWING THREAT TO EGYPT OF QADHAAFI'S IRRATIONALITY. IN THEIR VIEW BOTH ARE CONNECTED, SINCE VITRIOLIC PUBLIC DIATRIBE MAY DRIVE QADHAAFI TO MORE EXTREME
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MEASURES AGAINST EGYPTIAN REGIME.

2. ALARM BEING EXPRESSED ABOUT QADHAAFI BY THESE INDIVIDUALS IS, WE BELIEVE, INCREASINGLY SHARED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF GOE. IT REFLECTS, MOREOVER, A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN VIEWPOINT ABOUT LIBYAN LEADER. LESS THAN A YEAR AGO, EGYPTIANS TENDED TO REGARD QADHAAFI AS SOMETHING OF A FOOL, BUT A FOOL WHOSE VIEWS COULD BE DEALT WITH OR TURNED ASIDE. NOW THEY ARE LESS CERTAIN, AND LAST MONTH'S AFFAIR OF MILITARY TECHNICAL ACADEMY--WHICH MOST BELIEVE WAS ONE SUCH SCHEME--HAS RIVEN HOME TO THEM FACT THAT QADHAAFI IS PREPARED TO STRIKE AT THE STABILITY AND POSSIBLY THE LIFE, OF SADAT REGIME IN ORDER TO ATTAIN HIS ENDS. IT IS NO LONGER EASY TO DISMISS QADHAAFI AS A MADMAN OR DELIQUENT CHILD; AND ONE INCREASINGLY HEARS THAT HE IS A THREAT.

3. FROM EGYPTIAN POINT OF VIEW, SEVERAL OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE, ONE IS INACTION, NOT THE LEAST PALATABLE BOTH BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF ITS ALTERNATIVE, AND BECAUSE OF A NATURAL TENDENCY TO LET THINGS RIDE IN HOPE THAT THEY WILL IMPROVE.

4. OTHER OPTION IS ACTION, WHICH MAY BE TAKEN AT ANY OF A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT LEVELS. AT UPPER END OF SCALE IS OVERT INTERVENTION AGAINST QADHAAFI; AND AT THIS MOMENT WE JUDGE THAT RESTRAINTS AGAINST SUCH DRASTIC MEASURE ARE STRONGER ENOUGH TO MAKE IT UNLIKELY. AT LOWER END OF SCALE IS VERBAL POLEMIC CARRIED OUT EITHER BY PRIVATE MESSAGES OR THROUGH PUBLIC MEDIA. IT IS AT THIS LEVEL WHICH IS PRESENTLY ACTING, AND IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT FOR THE NEAR FUTURE THIS WILL DEFINE THE LOWER LIMIT OF EGYPTIAN RESPONSE TO PERCEIVED LIBYAN HOSTILITY.

5. BETWEEN THESE EXTREMES THERE IS A RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES. IT MAY BE THAT GOE HAS DECIDED TO TAILOR LEVEL OF ITS RESPONSE TO LEVEL OF LIBYAN PROVOCATION, AND PUBLIC REPOSTE OF YESTERDAY TO TRIPOLI BROADCAST OF QADHAAFI'S LETTER TO SADAT SUGGESTS THAT THIS MAY BE THE CASE. NEVERTHELESS, THE HIGHER THE LEVEL OF RESPONSE, THE GREATER THE DANGER IS THAT QADHAAFI WILL RETALIATE IN GREATER DEGREE. ONE MATTER WHICH WORRIES GOE IN THIS REGARD IS FATE OF EGYPTIAN WORKERS IN LIBYA WHICH BY VARIOUS EGYPTIAN ESTIMATES RANGE TO 500,000 IN NUMBER (AS GIVEN

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TO AMBASSADOR MY MURAD GHALEB, DURING OCTOBER WAR WAS EGYPTIAN RESIDENT MINISTER IN TRIPOLI). THIS IS ONE RESTRAINT ON GOE'S USE OF GREATER FORCE THAN NECESSARY IN DEALING WITH QADHAAFI, BUT ONE WHICH WITH TIME AND THE CONTINUATION OF PRESENT TREND IN EGYPTIAN/LIBYAN RELATIONS MAY BECOME OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE TO SADAT'S PERCEPTION OF WHAT ACTION IS NECESSARY TO PROTECT BOTH HIMSELF AND INTERNAL STABILITY OF EGYPT. A MORE PERMANENT INHIBITION TO OVERT FORCEFUL COUNTERMEASURES IS COMMON

EGHPTIAN AND LIBYAN MEMBERSHIP IN ARAB LEAGUE. HOWEVER
IMPOTENT IT MAY BE IN OTHER SPHERES, AL MEMBERS WOULD
RALLY TO PREVENT OPEN CLASH BETWEEN TWO MEMBER STATES.

6. GOE WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH LIBYA AND CONTINUANCE
OF LIBYAN SUBSIDY, BUT IT HAS WRITTEN OFF QADHAAFI AS UNRE-
IABLE AND UNPREDICTABLE PARTNER. JALLUD IS REGARDED AS
ONLY A SHADE BETTER. WE HAVE IMPRESSION THAT EGYPTIANS WOULD
LIKE RECONSTITUTION OF LIBYAN RCC TO OCCUR, PREFERABLY FORM
WITHIN THAT WOULD GIVE GREATER LEADERSHIP ROLES TO RCC MODERATES
LIKE MUHAYSHI, AL-HUNI AND OTHERS. THEY RECOGNIZE, HOWEVER,
THAT THEIR PREFERRED CANDIDATES ARE ESSENTIALH WEAK IN CURRENT
KIBYAN POWER STRUCTURE AND THEY ARE UNDER NO ILLUSION THAT SUCH
RECONSTITUTION WILL TAKE PLACE IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE. FOR THE MOMENT,
THEREFORE, THEY ARE HANDLING QADHAAFI'S OUTBURSTS ON AN AD HOC
BASIS, MAKING A CASE BY EASE JUDEGMENT ON HOW TO REACT; AT
THE SAME TIME, THEY HAVE TAKEN SECURITY PRECAUTIONS TO COUNTER
ANTICIPATED LIBYAN SUBVERSIVE THREAT.

7. WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY ASSESSMENT EMBASSY TRIPOLI MAY
HAVE ON GOE/LIBYAN RELATIONS AS SEEN FORM THERE. WOULD ALSO
BE HELPFUL TO HAVE EMBASSY'S BEST ESTIMATE RE NUMBER OF
EGYPTIANS NOW IN LIBYA AND HOW THEY ARE FARING IN PRESENT
SITUATION OF ACUTELY STRAINED RELATIONS.
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